

LETTER VIII

Dear Friend,

Four facts beget one another and are linked by an indissoluble bond of kinship. Despotism, despoilment of the Church, schism and persecution: these are what we see in every epoch of history. These facts are in the present situation. I'm not saying they'll come out of it, please note; I'm just saying they're there. And facts are brothers only because ideas are sisters. Once established, the first thing that makes despotism, royal or popular, is to despoil the Church, its incorruptible rival. Impoverish it, in order to weaken it; weaken it, in order to keep it under control: nothing could be more logical. If the spoliation reaches the very head of the Church and strips it of its territorial independence: what will happen?

In the most favorable supposition, the word of the common Father becomes suspect. Right or wrong, this suspicion is the seed of schism. I won't insist. Please refer to what we have said about human freedom, which is also guaranteed by pontifical independence. If you want reasoning, read Napoleon 1st oft-quoted reflections.

One day the warrior was a theologian. He said: "The institution that maintains the Pope as guardian of Catholic unity is an admirable one. This leader is criticized for being a foreign sovereign and we must thank heaven for that. Can you imagine such an authority in the same country, alongside the government of the State? United with the government, this authority would become the despotism of the sultans; separated, hostile perhaps, it would produce an awful, intolerable rivalry. The Pope is out of Paris, and that's fine. He is not in Madrid or Vienna, which is why we support his spiritual authority. In Venne and Madrid, we are justified in saying the same. We are therefore happy that the Pope resides away from home, and that by residing away from home, he does not reside with his rivals. I don't support these things out of devout

stubbornness, but out of reason.“ (Reported by M. Thiers in the *History of the Consulate*.)

How many misfortunes Napoleon would have spared himself, had he taken his own words as a rule of conduct! But no; it is in the nature of despotism to want more than it should. Here lies the second supposition, more certain than the first, and much more serious.

The Pope, deprived of his independence, finds himself in conflict with the prince of whom he is the guest or vassal. Without being prevaricant, he cannot grant what is asked of him: what will happen? To find the answer, we don't have to go far back in history.

Our century has seen a Pope of saintly memory, a lamb of gentleness, but fortunately a lion of firmness. Stripped of his temporal domain, this Pope became the prisoner of the despoiler. To bend him to his unjust whims, there is no pressure that Caesar does not exert on the Pontiff. Seduced, threatened and mistreated, the Vicar of Jesus Christ wants to protest. His mouth is closed. He wants to continue teaching and governing the Church. His words cannot reach the ears of the Catholic world. Abused, he was dragged from prison to prison; and, in an event without precedent in the annals of ancient persecutions, for more than five years the government of the Church was made completely impossible for him.²⁶

If the voice of truth was necessarily mute, the voice of error was not. Around the pontifical prison, attempts at schism were pursued with an ardor and brilliance that brought the Church of France to the brink of ruin. It was time for Providence to intervene. It did so, as in all similar cases, in a direct and sovereign manner. He who laughs at the counsels of men and commands the elements, is the same One who said, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will

²⁶ Close custody . . . He was detained for five years and more, with all the roads completely blocked, so that he could not govern the Church of God, without any example similar to that in the ancient annals. *Brev.-Rom. 24 maii*.

build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He remembered his word: you know the rest.

I hear you, my dear friend; you're assuming, you say, that schism is in the spirit of the situation? even in this hypothesis, do you think it's possible? You already know my answer to the first question. The situation is the growing reign of the Revolution. And the Revolution wants better than schism. Pius IX himself said it: he wants the complete ruin of the Catholic religion, (*catholicam religionem funditùs evertere*). If it ever becomes the absolute mistress of its actions, we'll see what she's really thinking.

As for the governments which are in collusion with it and which claim to say to it, as God himself said to the Ocean: You will come this far, and forbid you to go further; Let us not, I wish, attribute to them any schismatic intention.²⁷ But are their dispositions, however good they may be today, enough to reassure us? Are men always masters of themselves, are they always masters of themselves and of events? Are we ignoring the influence of opinions, the so-called necessities of circumstances, so often invoked in times of revolution?

Let's not forget modern history. When the French Revolution began, did many of its protagonists have a preconceived intention to bring about the schism of the Civil Constitution? Nevertheless, the event did take place. At the bottom of the schismatic deed, you can read the signatures of the same men who had once sworn inviolable respect for the Catholic religion.

Your second question remains: is schism possible today? To put Catholics on their guard, I could simply recall the Apostle's words: "There must be heresies," let alone schisms. This is one of the thousand trials reserved for the Church. Does our age enjoy any immunity in this respect? Does it not bear in

²⁷ It must have come as no surprise that two days ago the government published a brochure entitled: ***Emperor and Pope***. This brochure is a direct call for schism. Here's a summary: "Suppression of Roman influence, appointment of a Patriarch, ecumenical council of the French episcopate, universal suffrage applied to the clergy, the State as director of religious administration, suppression of concordats, civil constitution of the clergy". Is the rendering clear enough?

its bosom the elements of this moral disease? **So what does it take to make a schism? Two things: negation AND affirmation. A negation of faith and obedience to the Church, and an affirmation of ambition to satisfy or well-being to preserve.**

Is negation missing these days? **Look around you, and judge the tree by its fruit. Where is the faith of the many? This square faith that nothing overturns, this faith all in one piece, which is or which is not, and for which any reprobate or suspicious concession is an apostasy? Isn't one of the characteristics of our time impatience with the yoke of religious authority? Is it not an unfortunately all too certain fact that most minds seek to escape by any tangent from the orbit of simple and complete faith? Can indifference even to dogmatic truth be carried further?**

As an authentic expression of these alarming dispositions, don't we have the equality before the **law of yes and no in matters of belief**: an unheard-of phenomenon in the Christian world, and one that pagan Rome experienced only in the days of its decadence? Do we not still have the quiet obstinacy of so many men of every condition and dignity who, even today, respond with contempt and sarcasm to the wrath of excommunication with which the Church has struck them?

Is this the affirmation? **Isn't another distinguishing feature of the present age the fever for pleasure? FOR TOO LARGE A PORTION OF SOCIETY, IS LIFE ANYTHING OTHER THAN A RACE FOR GOLD, DIGNITIES AND PLEASURES?** Whether the increase or simply the conservation of these goods, of which so many men have made their gods, depends on disobedience to the Church, is it really true that the faith of the martyrs has suddenly awakened in people's hearts, to the point of making everyone prefer poverty to fortune, humiliation to honors? What answer does the history of Germany, of England, of France itself and of all countries, **where schism has become the price of dignity and wealth?** The two elements of schism are therefore not lacking.

Now, schism, in principle, is, at a given moment, persecution in practice: another danger of the situation. No more than anywhere else, we are not accusing anyone's intentions here, and our aim is in no way to throw fanciful worries into souls. We only note one fact: the connection that exists between schism and persecution.

However great the number of defectors and worshippers of the fait accompli in the various eras of schism, the Church and its rights have always retained, and always will retain, intrepid defenders. Schismatic power has everywhere taken it upon itself to transform them into confessors of the faith and martyrs. This power wants to be obeyed by all, and at all costs. For them (the martyr), it's always a question of self-esteem and tranquillity, often a matter of life and death. Under these conditions, inherent to its nature, it is inevitably driven to break down all resistance. So we cut off the head without scruple, because we cut them off on principle.

The French Revolution is further proof of this. After solemnly declaring the liberty, equality and fraternity of all citizens, respect for religion and the inviolability of the king, it fell into schism. The next day, with no less solemnity, it decreed the proscription of priests and Catholics, the massacres of the Vendée, the reign of terror and the murder of Louis XVI.

Under the First Empire, didn't we see persecution marching in a parallel line, with the schismatic attempts of 1811? Remember Germany and England in the sixteenth century. Read what the very clement Emperor of Russia is doing today with regard to his Catholic subjects. Without going so far, see how the Italian revolution, which is still in its infancy, treats the faithful clergy in usurped countries. How many religious were hunted and robbed! How many bishops were fugitives, exiled or imprisoned!

But what's the point in proving the obvious? In all times and in all countries, despotism, despoilment of the Church, schism and persecution are four correlative facts. With the proscription of Christian law, the age of Caesars begins anew: and the age of Caesars is inevitably the age of martyrs. The

history of the past offers no exception to this law. Will the history of the present be happier? The future will tell.

All yours.